

Social studies in Denmark

A country report

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- Social Studies in Denmark is a separate subject on all levels in the educational system.
- The subject contains elements from economics, politics, sociology and international politics.
- The subject is compulsory on a basic level in the lower secondary school and upper secondary school.
- The subject is optional on higher levels in the upper secondary school.
- The subject is important in the development of student's knowledge about society and development of citizenship.

Purpose: The purpose of the article is to give a survey of the status of Social Studies in the Danish educational system. To deepen the survey the article also will contain some reflections of the contents and didactics of the subject.

Design and approach: The analysis of the contents and didactics will focus on the description of the curriculum and the examination system. The approach will primarily consist of reflections on basis of text analysis of curriculum, examples of oral and written exam and basic concepts of citizenship.

Findings: The main finding in the study is that it is important to understand the teaching in Social Studies both with regards to contents and didactics as an important part of developing the sense of citizenship.

Research limitations: The main focus will be on written material and the official curriculum. It would be of great value to do more qualitative research among students and teachers about the practice of teaching in relation to the official objectives of the subject.

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1 INTRODUCTION

“Samfundsfag” (Social Studies) was established as a separate subject in the educational system in Denmark in 1960's. Before that civic or political education was mainly integrated in the teaching in history¹.

The Danish Ministry of Education translates “samfundsfag” to Social Studies. It is important to emphasize that the content of the subject is different from how the term is used in e.g. the U.S. where Social Studies includes geography and history. It is not the case in Denmark. Samfundsfag/Social Studies in Denmark consists of aspects of politics, economics, sociology and international politics (see below). Another possible translation could be Social Sciences in order to emphasize that the subject is a mix of different social sciences. In this article we follow the official translation from the Ministry of Education: Social Studies.

Social Studies as a separate subject was first established in some parts of the upper secondary educational system (students from 16 – 19 years) but it was not before 1990's it became a compulsory separate subject in the last year in the “folkeskole” (lower secondary school) – (15 – 16 years old pupils) (Frehr, 1999; Christensen, 2011; Rapport, 2006).

In the next parts I will describe the characteristics of this relatively new subject with the main focus on “folkeskolen”(lower secondary school) and “alment gymnasium” (general upper secondary school). One of my main conclusions is that Social Studies fundamentally and in many ways has the same core and the same characteristics in the different part of the education system even the syllabi can be formulated in different ways especially in relation to didactics. Therefore I am sure that the considerations below covers the situation for the subject in all parts of the education system in Denmark.

To start with I will describe the situation for Social Studies in the “almene gymnasium” (general upper secondary school) both because it involves a broad introduction to the subject on the highest level (A-level) and because it opens for some general considerations of the nature of the subject covering all levels in the education system. After that I will also have some specific considerations about the subject in “folkeskolen” (lower secondary school).

2 SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE “ALMEN GYMNASIUM” (GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL)

Up to 2005 the compulsory part of the subject (C-level) in “almene gymnasium” (the general upper secondary school) was a part of the teaching in history but the students had the possibility to choose it as a separate subject on higher levels (B- and A-level).

The Danish Educational system

Compulsory education in the “Folkeskole” lasts 10 years and includes primary and lower secondary education. If young people want a “Studentereksamen” (Upper Secondary School Leaving Examination) they can choose between “Alment gymnasium” (General Upper Secondary School and the “Erhvervsgymnasium” (Vocational Upper Secondary School).

From 2005 the subject has been a separate compulsory subject on a basic level (C-level) in both the “alment gymnasium” (general upper secondary school) and the “erhvervsgymnasium” (vocational upper secondary school) with almost the same content. In the general upper secondary school the student might choose Social Studies at both B- and A-level. A-level exists only in the general upper secondary school while students in the vocational upper secondary school might choose the subject on B-level. In the commercial part of the vocational upper secondary school the subject only exists on C-level. Instead the students can choose either international economy or business economy.

Now a days packages with Social Studies are the most popular in the general upper secondary school (in 2017 app. 45% of the students had chosen a package with Social Studies). Since most of the teaching in Denmark is not organized in “traditional” lessons it is better to get an impression of the size of the subject by comparing the hours for teaching in Social Studies to the

total amount of hours for the teaching during the three years in the upper secondary school. Social Studies on C-level has a size of 75 hours (3%), B-level 200 hours (8%) and A-level 325 hours (13%) of a total of 2600 hours. The size has been almost the same during the years.

Most of the subjects in the Danish gymnasium are compulsory for all students (Danish Literature, History, Classical Studies, Mathematics (A- or B-level), P.E. etc.). But beside this all students have to choose a package of two – three subjects that gives a certain level of specialization. The package can consist of subjects from the natural sciences, languages or social sciences. In relation to social sciences the students in the general upper secondary school can choose a package that consists of Social Studies and English on A-level or Social Studies and Math on A-level. In the technical part of the vocational upper secondary school, the students can choose packages that contains Social Studies on B-level and business- or international economics.

On the basic level in the lower secondary school and C- and B-level in the upper secondary school the teaching mainly takes the starting point in current Danish affairs while international politics is an essential part of the teaching on A-level. But due to the globalization international aspects have got a more prominent role in the teaching at all levels.

From the very beginning of the subject in 1960's Social Studies in Denmark has been a integration of elements from the basic social sciences: economics, sociology, politics and international politics – and methods in social sciences. The broad and extensive approach with integrating aspects from different social sciences to the teaching in Social Studies has some great advantages but also gives some challenges for the teaching. This will be discussed in detail later in the article.

On the highest level (A-level) in the general upper secondary school the subject is concluded with both an oral and a written exam. On all other levels and other parts of the educational system the teaching finishes with only an oral exam. The occurrence of oral exams is quite a special thing for the Danish educational system so a short explanation how this is going might be necessary.

All subjects are organized with the possibility of an oral exam at the end of the year but it is decided by drawing lots which subjects actually will be drawn. Typical each student will be taking 2 – 3 exams every year.

The examination questions are prepared by the teacher and shall cover the whole syllabus. On C-level the material for the examination consists of 2 – 4 pages with current articles, statistics etc. The student has 30 minutes for preparation. On B- and A-level the schools can choose between an oral exam with 24 hours or 60 minutes preparation. In both cases the examination lasts 30 minutes. Of course the requirements are different depending on the time for preparation but in all cases the student is expected to analyze and discuss the material relating it to theories and methods in Social Studies.

Example of the material to an oral exam on A-level, Topic: The Welfare State

On a basis of a row of enclosures the student has to prepare a presentation with his or hers own formulation of a problem. After the presentation there will be discussion between the teacher and the student.

The examination is carried out by the teacher. To ensure the quality of the material used for the examination and that the examination and the evaluation follow all rules the Ministry of Education designates a censor from another school. After each examination the teacher and the censor discuss the performance and give a mark. In case of disagreement the opinion of the censor weighs most.

If there are any problems with the examination questions or the teaching does not live up to the syllabus the censor is obliged to address the principal. Fortunately this does not happen very often.

On A-level there is also a written examination. The Ministry of Education appoints a group of experienced and entrusted teachers called the "Opgavekommission" (written examination commission) who prepares the written examination paper. Unlike the decentralized oral exam the written exam is central (Wikman, 2014). All students in the whole country are going to answer the same paper the same day.

The written exam is in this way very important to ensure that the teachers teach in the core aspects of the subject since the contents of the written examination paper cover the core syllabus of the subject.

The written examination paper has a common topic for example The welfare state, New challenges for the world order, Denmark and the European Union or Values of modernity (see example below).

Within this common topic the written examination paper is split up into a compulsory part covering some basic skills in the subject and an optional part where the student has the possibility of choosing between different aspects of the subject for example a more sociological or a more economical based paper.

Example of written examinations paper³

**Social Studies A
Upper Secondary School
Leaving examination**

VALUES AND MODERNITY

General section (compulsory)

1 a. From an idealistic core value point of view, argue *against* Kenneth Waltz's views on international security as they appear below.

1 b. What can be concluded from Figure 1 about the relationship between the length of education and the importance of work being interesting

Subsidiary assignments (The student shall choose one of these)

Subsidiary assignment A: Values in Europe

2. Examine what can be concluded from the material in Enclosure A1 on the similarities and differences in values of the populations in the six chosen countries.

Your examination must be supported by relevant calculations.

3. Discuss whether Danish values are a threat to the Danish welfare state.

Your discussion must be based on Enclosure A2 and you must use knowledge of economics.

Subsidiary assignment B: Political changes

2. Examine what can be concluded from the material in Enclosure B1 on how the political attitudes and political participation of young people differs from the rest of the population.

Your examination must be supported by relevant calculations.

3. Discuss what consequences the political behaviour of young people have for the relationship between parties and voters.

Your discussion must be based on Enclosure B2, and you must use your knowledge about the media and voter behaviour in the late-modern society.

Subsidiary assignment C: Denmark's foreign policy

2. Compare the views on Denmark's foreign policy that are expressed in enclosures C1, C2 and C3.

In your comparison you must use your knowledge of power in international politics.

3. You are the foreign policy adviser for Foreign Minister Martin Lidegaard (SocLib). Write a memorandum allowing Martin Lidegaard to be able to argue that Denmark should orient itself more towards the EU in foreign policy issues.

The memorandum must be based on Enclosure C4 and you must use your knowledge of Denmark's options as a small state in acting in international politics.

(Source: own archive)

As it appears from this example the written examination paper (Wikman, 2014) demands that the students are able to

- Use theories and concepts from Social Studies on current affairs
- To read statistics and make calculations
- To work on different taxonomic levels

In the next paragraph we will see how the written examination paper reflects the competences in the syllabus.

One may consider a critical remark about the written examination. As mentioned above the written examination ensures that the teachers have focus on the core elements of the subject. This is of course important but may have the disadvantage that the teachers can be motivated to “teach for test” and forget other important goals of the teaching. It is a balance that the teachers have to be aware of.

It is allowed for the students to bring all textbooks and other material to the written examination, but as you can experience from the example (see the box) the written examination demands that the students can approach the theories and methods to current societal themes. Bringing the textbooks is an advantage because it is possible for the students to make some references in the books about specific theories. It is an advantage for the well prepared student who knows the textbook but it is not of much help for the unprepared student who sometimes uses the time seeking in the textbook for some answers.

There have been some experiments where the students have been allowed to access the internet during the written exam. The former government in Denmark (up to June 2019) did for political reasons stop these experiments and after a new government was established in the summer 2019 the situation is not clear whether it will be allowed again. The opponents of allowing access to the internet during the exam are nervous about cheating and whether you get the right impression the students. The supporters of the possibility for access to the internet argue that the examination form have to be developed so they reflect the way the students work during the daily teaching. There will without any doubt be a great discussion about this issue in the years to come.

The papers are censored by two external censors and the teacher is not taking part in the evaluation. Before the censors start evaluating the papers the national subject adviser (see below about this) and the examination commission elaborate some guidelines for the evaluation. All censors will gather at a meeting and under the chairmanship of the national subject adviser they will agree on the mark for each student. All teachers can apply to be a censor and it is an extremely valuable experience for the teachers’ own teaching to be a censor since you come to know the challenges of writing examination papers very well.

The system with both an oral and written exam ensures that the students develop different competences in the subject. I will later argue that especially the written exam is a very important general preparation for further and higher education.

3 “SOCIAL STUDIES IN “FOLKESKOLEN” (LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL)

When Social Studies was established in “Folkeskolen” (Lower secondary school) in the middle of the 1990’s (Chistensen, 2017) it was one of the few subjects that did not have an exam. The consequence of that was that the subject got some kind of low-status compared to other subject that ended with an exam. In 2006 the Ministry of Education took the initiative to introduce an exam in the subject and now a days it has the same status as other subjects.

Social Studies in “Folkeskolen” is a rather small subject normally placed in the last two years of the lower secondary school. It takes up approximately 6% of the teaching time in both years.

Since Social Studies became a subject with an oral exam in “Folkeskolen” (lower secondary school) the exam has consisted of several steps:

- The pupils draw one of the topics from the teaching as a focus for the oral exam
- The pupils write a presentation within this topic
- On basis of the written presentation the teacher prepares questions for the pupils.
- On the day of exam the pupils get time for preparation (25 minutes) to find answers to the question from the teacher.
- Finally the pupil will go through the actual oral exam (25 minutes)

The mark is given solely on basis of the oral examination. The examination is carried out by the teacher in co-operation with a censor designated from another school.

This way of organizing the oral exam ensures that the pupils have to use several competences. They both have to study a topic in depth, write a presentation and go through an oral dialogue. In other words they have to master a whole variety of competences in relation to the subject and at the same time be able to analyze, present and discuss societal problems. The whole arrangement about the oral exam is based on the pupils’ ability to master different taxonomic levels. In this way the goals for the oral exam is a good preparation for Social Studies in the upper secondary schools.

Example of an oral exam in the “Folkeskole” (Lower secondary school)

- Topic from the teaching which is drawn by the pupils : Politics and ideology
- The pupils formulation of the problem: Has the classical ideologies any meaning in Denmark today?

Presentation: A paper and a video with interviews with young politicians

Teachers question as starting point for the oral examination:

How do you see the connections between welfare, economy and ideology? Consider similarities and differences between Denmark and one other country in Europe:

3 The content of Social Studies

It is characteristic that the descriptions of the aim and identity of the subject in different of part and different levels have many similarities. The basic understanding of the subject is essentially the same regardless of level and place in the educational system. The following discussion covers both the “folkeskole” (lower secondary school) and the general and vocational upper secondary school.

Who is responsible for writing the syllabus?

It is of course the Ministry of Education which is responsible for developing the syllabi for the subjects. In practice it is the national subject adviser (see chapter 5.3) who is responsible for writing the syllabus. When a new syllabus is going to be developed the national subject adviser appoint a group of teachers e.g. from the teacher association to take part in the work and a representative from the universities. Of course the Ministry of Education gives some guidelines and a framework for development of new syllabi. There have been a few examples of direct political interference in the development of syllabi e.g. in the description of what has to be taught in History but the tradition is that the subjects have a great independence in how the syllabus is developed. In the latest reform of the upper secondary school (2017) it was said in the political agreement between the political parties in the "Folketing" (the Parliament) that Social Studies have to include "the right and duties in a democratic society, including equality between the sexes"

In the description of the aim for Social Studies in the "folkeskole" (lower secondary school) it is said (UVM Folkeskolen 2019)

"The aim for the teaching in Social Studies is that the pupils get knowledge about society and the historical changes. The teaching shall prepare the pupils to take active part in a democratic society....

The teaching shall contribute to the pupil's understanding of themselves and others as part of society which they can influence and are influenced of and the understanding of the daily life in a societal and historical perspective."

And further about the content it is said that the pupils shall have knowledge and skills within politics (power, decision making and democracy), economics (production, work and consumption) and social and cultural conditions (socialization, culture and identity)

In the general upper secondary school the identity of the subject is described in this way (UVM Gymnasier 2017):

"Social Studies deal with Danish and international social conditions. The subject gives on a theoretical and empirical basis knowledge and understanding of the dynamic and complex forces ...that influence the development of society. By combining the development of society to sociological, economic and political concepts, the student will be qualified to take a point of view and act...The students will attain general education and will be prepared for further education."

And further on it is said:

"The general education shall be promoted by giving the students interest for and ability to take part in the democratic discussion... The teaching shall promote the independence and confidence of the students so they are able to discuss and take a position to problems in society on a qualified basis."

There are at least two very important aspects of this descriptions.

First Social Studies is defined a subject that tries to combine the theories of Social Studies with the current affairs and problems in society. It is emphasized in the syllabus that the teaching shall be versatile as regards choice of theories but there is not a fixed curriculum for which theories

shall be mentioned. It is an important goal for the teaching that the students come into possession of analytical tools to analyze the development of society in order to be able to take their own point of views on a more qualified basis.

Secondly Social Studies has the important goal to improve the democratic discussion and make this more qualified. You can distinguish between a narrow goal to give students knowledge and analytical tools and a broader goal to prepare the students for taking part in democracy (Brøndum, 2018). Another way around is to emphasize that the subject has an important part of preparing the student for citizenship (Mouritsen, 2015; Cristensen, 2015). I will later in the article discuss the connection between Social Studies and other subjects in the school concerning the question of citizenship.

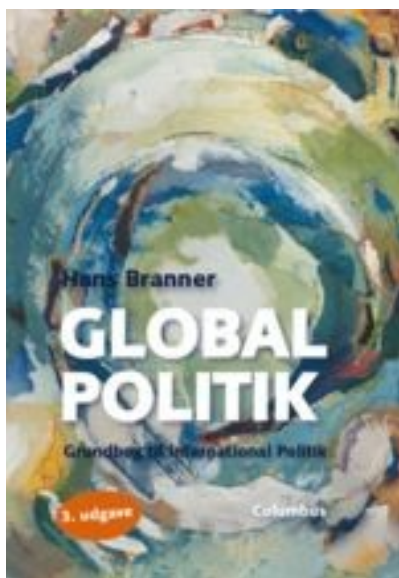
Thirdly Social Studies is not only an academic subject. It is an important part of the subject to make the students active and responsible. In this way Social Studies is an important part of establishing a sense of citizenship among the students.

As mentioned the syllabus in Social Studies (see above) consists of core elements from sociology, economics, politics and international politics. Let me give a few examples from the syllabus:

- Sociology e.g. identity, social differentiation in Denmark and other countries and media
- Politics e.g. political ideologies, concepts of power and democracy and political decision making
- Economics e.g. principles of welfare, market economy, globalization and macroeconomic policy
- International politics e.g. Power, security, international conflicts and integration

In addition, research methods in Social Studies are a compulsory part of the teaching. The teaching shall include basic qualitative and quantitative methods e.g. interview and, questionnaires, statistical measures and statistical uncertainty. It is emphasized that the students also make their own (small) research and in this way get some practical experiences with using methods. It is also important to emphasize that both the core elements and the methods are parts of the written examination.

Figure 1: A textbook about global politics (inter-national politics) – an important part of the teaching in Social Studies on A-level



The syllabus in the “almene gymnasium” (general upper secondary school) is very open and there is now a days not an exact number of pages that shall be read. Due to the multifarious teaching materials and the development of digital based material it gives no meaning to have a fixed number of pages that should be read. In the general upper secondary school there was for a period not any guidelines for how many pages that should be read. But a more conservative Minister of Education has in 2017 decided that a that a range of number of pages should be indicated in the syllabi e.g between 650 and 950 pages on A-level. It gives still quite a leeway for the teacher. In the “Folkeskole” there is no fixed number of pages that should be read. Instead the syllabus consists of a number of competences in the different topics in Social Studies: politics, economy etc. that the pupils have to obtain (UVM 2019).

Instead of a detailed description of the contents, the syllabus both in “Folkeskolen” (lower secondary school) in the “almene gymnasium” (general upper secondary school) contains some goals for what has to be learned. Below some of the most important of this are mentioned (UVM laereplaner 2017):

“The student shall be able to

- Apply and combine the knowledge from the core element of the subjects to examine current societal problems in Denmark and other countries
- Formulate academic problems and gather and work up material (also statistical material) to examine and discuss problems
- Analyze and communicate – both oral and written – empirical and theoretical connections on different taxonomic levels”

And quite similar in the “Folkeskole” (lower secondary school). The pupils shall have

- “knowledge about and understanding for societal problems..
- (ability) to critical thinking and being able to investigate and verify arguments..
- (taking part in) discussions of societal problems” (UVM 2019)

On taxonomic levels (Wikman, 2014; Brøndum, 2018):

“Having the faculty of working on different taxonomic levels is the decidedly core of the Social Studies in order to make the students ready for further and higher education. We define the taxonomic levels in this way:

Give an account of... That means to find the focus in the material and describe this
Examine/compare... That means to find and show the connections and explanations in the material by using theories and methods from Social Studies

Discuss... That means to discuss different solutions to the problem that is examined and argue for and against the solutions by using theories and methods from Social Studies.

Example: Economic relations between Britain and the EU

Examine what can be deduced from the material in Enclosure C1 about the importance of the EU for the British economy.

The examination must be supported by relevant calculations and you must use knowledge about economic cooperation in the EU.

3. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks the United Kingdom (UK) will face by leaving the EU. The discussion must be based on Enclosure C2 and you must use knowledge about international economics.

The enclosure consists of both statistics and current articles.
 (Source Own Archive)

The German researcher in didactics Wolfgang Klafki (Klafki, 2016; Klafki, 2004; Johansen 2002; Brøndum, 2018) has developed some very useful concepts that can be used for analyzing the character of Social Studies. The subject has elements of both material education and formal education. The material aspect of the subject is based upon the core elements from the scientific

disciplines economics, sociology, politics and international politics. The students have to acquire knowledge from these disciplines. As mentioned before this knowledge is an important part what is expected in the written examination.

But what has even as important in Social Studies from the very beginning is the focus on formal education. When the goals for the subject say that the teaching shall promote “...*interest for and ability to take part in the democratic discussion...*” the main emphasis in the teaching must be put on developing the skills of the students in taking part, thinking critically and realize themselves as citizens in society.

In the daily teaching it is important to integrate both aspects – both the material and the formal education – into what Klafki call categorial education. The categorial education emphasizes that the student should see him- or herself as an active social being. Therefore the classroom-teaching should attach importance to the dialogue and to include the experiences of the students.

There might be a problem or maybe even a contrast between the very broad and extensive description of the subject at all levels – from the “folkeskole” to the A-level in the general upper secondary school and the emphasis that the teaching shall develop the pupils and the students as active social beings. Especially in the “folkeskole” and the lower levels in the upper secondary school it is difficult for the teachers to cover all the content of the subject while they at the same time shall focus on developing the pupils and the students as active social beings (interview with teachers in “folkeskole” – own archive). The crowding of content can be a challenge fulfilling the other goals for the teaching.

In the paragraph about the identity of Social Studies it is said, that (UVM Gymnasier 2017):

“The teaching shall promote the independence and confidence of the students so they are able to discuss and take a position to problems in society on a qualified basis.”

It makes sense to say that an essential part of the identity of the subject is close to what categorial education requires when it is emphasized that the teaching shall develop the students to be active, independent and critical citizens.

4 THE DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES

The Danish tradition for designing the syllabus of a subject can be described in two ways:

- In the beginning of the syllabus one finds some rather broad goals for the teaching. Here you find the competences and broad qualifications that should be the output of the teaching.
- The contents of the subjects are described in very broad terms (see above).

The syllabus contains rather few didactic guidelines for the teaching. It is shortly emphasized that the teaching should be organized with a starting point in current themes and that the teaching shall contain both inductive and deductive ways of teaching. The importance of independent work of the students is very much emphasized and so is also the importance of being comprehensive in relation to choices of angles, theories and methods in the teaching.

This very broad and general way of writing the syllabus give the teachers a very great responsibility in organizing the teaching and achieving the goals. Or formulated in another way: It gives the teachers both great possibilities and great responsibilities – and a lot of work to develop the teaching! It is common that the teachers at each school make a common plan for the teaching in the subject, but it is an initiative that can be taken by the teachers and sometimes

also by the management. But in the end of the day it is the single teacher who is responsible for making his or her own plan for the teaching.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the choice of textbooks is optional. The decision about textbooks is solely taken by the single teacher or by the teacher group in a school - of course within the economic limits of the school. All textbooks are bought by the school and without any cost at disposal for the students. It has always been in this way in Denmark. I will later describe the market for textbooks in social Studies in Denmark (see chapter 4).

How do the teachers plan the teaching within these broad guidelines? What is the teaching practice? To give an impression of this I will give a "typical" example of an actual plan:

"Theme: Is there a crisis in the Danish welfare state?"

The purpose is to analyze and discuss aspects of the Danish welfare state and make some comparisons with welfare state in other countries.

- Sociological aspects: Social differentiation in Denmark and marginalization of social groups.
- Economic aspects: Financing of the welfare state and the challenges of financing in the future.
- Political aspects: Comparison of the Danish model of the welfare state with e.g. the German and American model."

(Source: Own Archive)

The theories and concepts can be covered by reading some chapters in the most common textbooks. In order to achieve the goal of examining current societal problems in Denmark and other countries the teacher has to plan the teaching after a principle of current interest by finding current articles and statistics from newspapers and magazines and relate this material to the sociological, economic and political theories in the textbook. This is the way in which theories are combined with current problems. The broad guidelines for the teaching in Social Studies makes it possible to be quite topical e.g. if there is an election or a sudden political event occurs.

On the A-level the teacher will finish the plan with some written homework to improve the understanding of the taxonomic levels.

As everybody can imagine this way of planning the teaching demands a great capacity of the teachers. They have to find the right textbook that fits to the level of the students, they must have a great knowledge of current societal problems and they shall be able to find the best material that can illustrate the connection between the theories and "the real world". It demands a lot of preparation and because of the dynamics of the society you have limited possibilities to reuse the same plan. Any plan must be adjusted to a new class and a new situation. This situation is both challenging and exciting. As a teacher in Social Studies you have to develop your teaching the whole time. The teachers have to make your own supplementary training all the time. There are some possibilities for courses but it is only a small part of what is needed to be well prepared teacher.

Fortunately, the development of digital platforms has made it lot easier to both adjust the plans and not least to share the plans with colleagues both at the same school and more general. There is not open access to these platforms. It requires password from the school. The facebook-group of teachers in Social Studies is very active. Every day teachers share plans, discuss new ideas and pass on material of all kind. The homepages of the publishing companies are also an important source of information and inspiration. In this way the digital platforms are mines of information. The access to information also demands qualifications by the teachers to teach the students to be critical towards what they find on the internet.

I will emphasize one more thing about the qualifications of the teachers in Social Studies: The ability to plan the progression of the teaching. Social Studies is (see above) compulsory in the

lower secondary school (age 15 – 16) so they have a little knowledge about Social Studies when they start at the upper secondary level (both general and vocational). Social Studies is a very complex and also in many ways a very abstract subject so the teachers have to be very careful when they introduce and develop the concepts, models and the theories.

When you read the syllabus you can be short of breath. As a student in Social Studies you are supposed to have knowledge about different topics from microsociology to economics and international politics, to be able to reflect about different theories in all the different areas of the subject and have knowledge about methods in Social Studies. As a teacher you have to be very conscious about the progression and the planning of the teaching in order to make the students understand the complexity of the theories. There is no doubt that the question of progression is one of the greatest didactic challenges for the teachers at all levels.

5 TEXTBOOKS AND TEACHING MATERIAL IN SOCIAL STUDIES



Figure 2:

As mentioned above the choice of textbooks is optional for the teachers. There are not any regulations from The Ministry of Education which textbooks the teachers are supposed to use. This situation creates a market for publishing companies although you have to remember that the total market due to the population of Denmark (5.5 mio.) is rather small.

The biggest publishing company for textbooks in Social Studies is the publishing company Columbus. It was established by three teachers in Social Studies as a very small company in the 1970'es just in the period where the subject was growing in the general upper secondary school. From the very beginning the teachers in Social Studies felt it was their publishing company and there are close relations between the teachers, the teacher association (see below) and the publishing company. Starting with mainly voluntarily work Columbus has developed to a professional publishing company which, without a doubt, is in a leading position in publishing textbooks for Social Studies.

A basic textbook in sociology that can be used on both A-, B- and C-level (different chapters for each level) (Picture 2) Like most of the textbooks in Social Studies the main content is author text combined with short extracts from newspaper articles, pictures, figures. Especially new textbooks try to emphasize the didactic dimension by e.g. writing short introductions summaries. Often the printed textbook is combined with a homepage with supplementary texts, question etc.⁴

The development of electronic and inter-active books has started in Denmark also in Social Studies but up to now it is not very widespread partly because of the price for licenses and partly because we are in the beginning of the process. But there is also an important didactic discussion going on among the teachers and in the publishing companies about the advantages and disadvantages of using electronic books. There exist a few examples of inter-active textbooks in economics in which it is possible to solve exercises about calculations of economic problems. They are not for free. It is necessary to buy a license to get access. It is difficult to envisage the development but it will without any doubt be one of the interesting didactic discussions in the years to come.

It is very easy to find material of current interest in some of the digital data bases that is established by newspapers, think tanks, organizations and libraries. The challenge is that you have to pay for access to some of the data bases so it can be an economic problem for the schools. But there is also a lot of very interesting material with open access. One of the most interesting is an open data base that is established at the University of Aalborg⁵ which contains a lot of statistics about political behavior for example exit polls from the elections to the Danish Parliament. It is possible for the students to make their own statistics for example about the relations between sex, age etc. and political attitudes and also follow the development of political attitudes for the last decades. It gives great opportunities for both getting knowledge about political behavior and to develop the skills of making statistics.

The internet is a mine of information but is also very demanding for the teachers to find the most relevant material. Furthermore, it is a very important task for the teachers to teach the students both to find the material, select the most relevant and not least be critical towards the material. In the era of fake news it is maybe one of the most important competences to teach the students to be critical towards all kind of information. It is of course an important duty for the whole school system. But since the core of Social Studies is to integrate current societal problems in the teaching it is a special duty for the teachers to learn the student to be critical towards all kind of mass media and social media.

Language policy and bi-lingual social Studies teaching: I want to add an interesting information about teaching materials and language. Since Denmark is a very small language area it is allowed to use some texts in foreign languages in the teaching. By and large you talk of texts in English. In some schools (about 10 of the 130 general upper secondary schools) it is possible for the students to choose a class in Social Studies (and sometimes also History, Religious Studies and other subjects) where the teaching and the exam (both oral and written) is in English. Obviously this classes are rather demanding for the students but also is a way of developing the language skills so they are really prepared for further and higher education. You have to aware that almost all textbooks at the university studies in Denmark are in English.

To conclude about textbooks and teaching material, it is the responsibility of teachers to choose both. It gives a great responsibility but also really good opportunities for planning and implementing current teaching. Since there is an opportunity that the student shall pass both and oral and written exam the teachers have to be very careful to achieve the goals in the syllabus. Balancing between implementing current teaching and achieving the goals is one of the great challenges for the teachers. In the daily teaching teachers have to be aware of this balance the whole time, since both goals – discussing current affairs and preparing for the exam – are important.

6 EDUCATIONAL POLICY: HOW TO GOVERN - THE RELATION BETWEEN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND THE TEACHING

This paragraph takes its starting point in the general upper secondary school. In spite of this many of the principles how to govern the teaching in Social Studies in this part of the educational system can be transferred to other parts of the system.

As mentioned above the syllabus for Social Studies is formulated in broad goals and broad guidelines about the contents.

On this background it is natural to ask: How can the Ministry of Education be sure that the goals for the teaching are being achieved? How is it possible to govern the teaching – and the teachers – in a way that you can be sure to have a nation-wide standard?

I think there at least three answers to these questions:

6.1 The education of teachers

The education of teachers in Social Studies in the upper secondary schools takes place at 5 universities (Copenhagen, Roskilde, Southern Denmark, Aarhus and Aalborg) and is in most aspects built up of the same core elements/disciplines that is mentioned above: sociology, politics, economics, international politics and methods in social Studies. There has been a widespread consensus about the contents of the education since the education was established in the 1960'es. In this way the teachers are educated within the same framework. In fact, there has never been any real disagreements about the main contents of the subject. The main differences between the social science education among the universities is how much they stress the teaching in didactics of the subject. To ensure the national standard the Ministry of Education has made an executive order that contains the compulsory competences for the teacher.

A teacher in the general and vocational upper secondary school normally teach two subjects and have to follow the above-mentioned education in both subjects. The combination is completely free, e.g. Social Studies with math, geography or history.

When a teacher gets a job at a general or vocational upper secondary school he or she will within the first year go through "Pædagogikum" (Pedagogical education) which consists of pedagogical and didactic education. He or she will teach a few classes under the instruction of experienced teachers. Three times during the year an experienced teacher from another school appointed by the Ministry of Education will follow the teaching and together with the local teachers give advices. A written report about the pedagogical and didactic qualifications of the teacher will be worked out.

Beside this the new teachers will follow some courses both about general pedagogical affairs and the didactics of the subject. At the end of the theoretical courses the teacher shall write an essay about a topic chosen by the university which plans the theoretical education.

After a reform of Pædagogikum in the beginning of the 2000'es the theoretical and didactic aspects of Pædagogikum have been strengthened. A new "Institut for kulturvidenskaber" (Department for the Study of Culture)⁶ which focus on theory of education was established at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense. The department is responsible for the general pedagogical and didactic courses for new teachers and also plans courses for the experienced teachers who are instructors for the new teachers.

The education of the teachers both at the universities and the first year in the school system in Pædagogikum is a very effective way to socialize the teachers to the tradition in the subjects and to ensure a widespread consensus among the teachers. In order to ensure a national standard and a national consensus this way of socializing new teachers can be seen as very effective. But on the other hand you can ask the question whether this efficiency could be an obstacle for new ideas and new ways of teaching. It is not a discussion we have had in Denmark but maybe we ought to have it?

Teachers to the "Folkeskole" (Lower secondary school) are educated at University Colleges six different places in Denmark. The education lasts 4 years and consists of basic subjects and compulsory pedagogical and didactic topics together with practical experience in primary and lower secondary schools. Beside that the future teachers have to choose normally three subjects in which they are going to teach. One of this has to be Danish and Math.

For a long period it has been a problem in the lower secondary school that there has been a lack of teachers specialized in Social Studies. The recent years the problem has been less extensive since the subject has become more popular as a specializing subject in the education of teachers.

6.2 The written examination system

As mentioned earlier the teaching at all levels can end with an oral exam. At A-level you also have a written examination. The oral exam is prepared by the teacher but at all oral exams a teacher

from another school takes part as censor. This system ensures that there is continuous discussion among the teachers. It is important to emphasize that all teachers can be censors.

The written examination is prepared by the examination commission appointed by the Ministry of Education and the national subject adviser and all student on A-level will have the same paper to answer (Wikman, 2014). It is a very effective way to ensure that all teachers teach the core syllabus. The examination commission and the national subject adviser work out some guidelines for correcting the examination paper and of course the examination paper and the guidelines is used the following year in the daily teaching.

Instead of very detailed guidelines for the teaching from the Ministry of Education the examination system is a very effective way of ensuring the quality of teaching and at the same time ensure that the goals for the teaching are achieved. You can say that it is an indirect but rather effective way of governing. It follows the Danish tradition with great responsibility and great possibilities for the teachers to choose the way of teaching which suits best for the teacher and the students. Even we do not have detailed guidelines for the teaching you can ask the question if the focus in the daily teaching on the written examination motivates teachers "to teach for test" and in this way give a lower priority to other aspects of the subject e.g. preparing students for citizenship.

6.3 The national subject adviser

Undervisningsministeriet (Danish Ministry of education) appoints for every subject a "fagkonsulent" (national subject adviser). Normally he or she is appointed for a period of 7-10 years and you, of course, have to be an experienced and well-qualified teacher to have the possibility for being appointed as a national subject adviser. The national subject adviser can shortly be described as a connection between the teachers and the Ministry of Education and has a very important role to ensure and develop the subject.

The main objects for the subject adviser are:

- working out syllabi and guidelines for the teaching
- together with the examination commission having the responsibility for the written examination
- together with the teacher association (see below) developing in-service training for the teachers
- being responsible for the didactic courses for new teachers
- Arrange general courses about the development of the subject

The Ministry of Education has established a digital platform for teaching material – EMU (Electronic Meeting Place for Teaching)⁷. This is a mine of information for all parts of the educational system – from the primary school to the upper secondary school. On this platform you can find general information about the educational system for example about teaching in democracy and the national strategy for improving natural Studies. But the main contents of the platform is about the subjects. Each subject has their own part of the platform where you can find learning materials, ideas for teaching lessons etc. It is also an important platform for the national subject adviser. Guidelines and other material from the national subject adviser will be published on this platform.

In the beginning of this paragraph we asked: How can the Ministry of education be sure that the goals for the teaching are being achieved? How is it possible to govern the teaching – and the teachers – in a way that you can be sure to have a nation-wide standard?

The three factors mentioned above give the most of the answer. The education of teachers, the examination system and the national subject adviser are the three main explanations for keeping a nation-wide standard although the teachers have lot of freedom to choose how to achieve the

goals. Denmark is a small country with 5.5. million inhabitants. The number of teachers in Social Studies in the general and vocational upper secondary school is about 1.700. That of course makes communication and governing an easier job than in bigger countries.

7 THE ASSOCIATIONS FOR TEACHERS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

There exist separate associations for teachers in Social Studies in the lower secondary school (which also include teachers in history), the vocational upper secondary school and the general upper secondary school. Most of the teachers are members of the association connected to their part of the educational system. The primary task for the association can be divided in two: To be the link between the teachers and the national subject advisers and to organize the in-service training for the teachers. Each association chooses a committee among the members and most of the associations also publish a magazine. E.g Foreningen Af Lærere Samfundsfag – FALS (the Association for Teachers in Social Studies) in the upper secondary school publishes “Samfundsfagsnyt” (News about Social Studies) quarterly. You can have an impression of the magazine by looking at the contents of the issue from spring 2019. The main contents of this was:

- News from the national adviser
- News from the association
- Academic articles about the situation in the Middle East
- Information of in-service training for the teachers
- Reviews of books

8 CLASSROOM PRACTISE

In is an important hypothesis in this article that there is a widespread consensus about the teaching in Social Studies in Denmark although the syllabus is formulated in a very broad and non-specific way. This can only be formulated as a hypothesis based on my own experience as a teacher, national subject adviser and principal for almost 40 years since there is very little research about the didactics of Social Studies (Stig Christensen, 2015, Christensen, 2011 and 2015). Also based on that I will sum up some of the main characteristics of the class room practice in teaching in Social Studies as I see them:

- Almost all lessons in Social Studies will consist of a mix between theories and current societal problems. The inductive way of teaching is without any doubt the most widespread but at all levels there is an interaction between inductive and deductive teaching. Especially for A-level students there will be lessons characterized by a more deductive approach. This is also a manner of achieving the goal that the teaching shall be a preparation for further and higher education (see below).
- Especially on the A-level written activities is very important not only for training for the written examination but also for learning purposes. In the box you can find a fine example of how the written dimension is used for improving the students' ability to combine theory with current affairs.

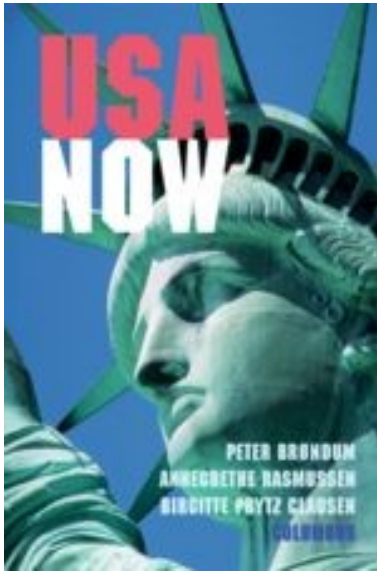


Figure 3: Current politics is an important part of Social Studies – an example of a textbook in English

Analysing Trump's State of the Union Address.

Write an analysis of Trump's State of the Union Address.

You should focus on different political aspects of his speech. Also, you should analyze the way in which he is persuading the audience and how is using data to emphasize his viewpoints.

In addition to showing knowledge about the American political system the student also for example involves theories of international politics in order to put the foreign policy of president Trump into perspective.

(Source: own archive)

- The teachers emphasize the importance of the discussion about theories and current social affairs. Teaching is not only reproduction of the concepts and theories. It is important to develop the student's ability to discuss about societal problem using the theories and concepts from the subject. This is very important since it is a manner of developing the sense of citizenship (see also below)
- Most teachers plan out-of-classroom activities. This is a way of doing the teaching more vivid and meaningful. Some of the main out-of-classroom activities are.
 - Visits to the Parliament (The Folketing) in order to discuss political affairs with politicians. The political parties are very open for those kinds of visits and it is an important way to socialize the students to participate in the political processes.
 - Visits to organizations and think tanks. Many organizations and think tanks have special sections for visitors and also often produce material targeted for schools.
 - Small "research-projects". The most common is to carry out exit polls in connection with parliamentary elections. This is a way to both doing the

teaching more relevant and at the same time improving the consciousness of methods in Social Studies.

- Debating activities. This can take different forms: from organizing debates as role play in the class room to take part in debate competitions which are organized between schools.

The common denominator for all this is to activate the students by combining the daily teaching with “the reality” and at the same time making the students conscious about the nature of the subject. Although the subject is as academic as other subjects it has a special obligation to prepare the students to be active citizens. To take this task serious also demands to arrange out-of-classroom activities as mentioned above.

What do the students say about Social Studies?

Social science is, in my opinion, one of the most important and educational subjects that an individual will encounter in the course of his education process. I believe that the subject has contributed greatly to my general education as it has provided me with knowledge about the structure and the course of society, which, in my view, is information that everyone should possess in order to be a part of and understand the modern society. The social science classes are always interesting and illuminating, which I believe, to a certain degree, to be a result of the fact that the majority of the issues debated in class are relevant and thought-provoking.

(Jonathan, 3b, Rungsted Gymnasium, Denmark)

I chose Social Studies because Social Studies seemed to be more interesting from an international perspective. Social Studies not only see societal problem from a Danish perspective but in a broader manner. I have chosen a Social Studies-line where we are taught in English which give a better teaching for example about American politics because interviews and articles all ready are in English.

(Rune 3b, Rungsted Gymnasium, Denmark)

Generally I think that Social Studies is a subject where I get a lot of knowledge that can be used in the real world. Social Studies is very versatile and you leave the school with a broad knowledge about economy, sociology, politics and the society generally...It has made my political opinions more differentiated since I know pros and cons about my attitudes.. In this way Social Studies has strengthened my critical attitude and given a greater perspective on some of the things I meet in my daily life.

(Simon, Rosborg Gymnasium, Denmark)

Social Studies is a subject that is very broad and you get introduced to a great many things...I get some new competences and a better understanding for politics and society generally. It makes easier to understand situations and conflicts in the international and national society... Personally I have strengthened my competences when I take part in discussions.

(Nina, Rosborg Gymnasium, Denmark)

(Source: Teachers interview, Mai 2019)

9 SOCIAL STUDIES AS PREPARATION FOR FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION – THE DANISH PERSPECTIVE

When you talk about preparation for further and higher education it is important to distinguish between specific and general competences. Among the specific topics you can mention a certain level in math or language. Teaching in Social Studies gives some specific qualifications if you

want to study for example political science or economics, but I think it is more important to emphasize Social Studies as a subject which improves the general competence for further and higher education especially in humanities and all kind of social sciences. In what manner can you argue for this? I think you can mention four main factors:

- The nature of Social Studies is to cope with complex theories and complex problems (Gilje, 2002; Bauman, 2003). If you are able to analyze the complexity of society you will be able to understand complex problems of any kind. In order to understand societal problems, you must be able to cope with multi-factor explanations and structures with complex relations between the elements in the structure. Take reasoning about economic models as an example. If you should be able to understand the background for an economic crisis you must be able to explain the relations between e.g. investment, interests, productivity, fiscal policy and the development on the labour market. Understanding that kind of complex relations improves your general ability to understand complex problems of any kind.
- Another important aspect of Social Studies is the multi-paradigmatic character (Gilje, 2002; Brøndum, 2018) of the subject. Take international politics or economics as examples. In international politics you have to explain international conflict both from a realistic and liberal point of view (and at least a couple of other theories). In economics you have to explain the differences of economic policy between supply side economics and Keynesianism. Examples of the multi-paradigmatic character of the subject are countless. To reason in this manner demands a high level of abstraction and is therefore a very important prerequisite for all kind of further and higher education.
- Being capable of coping with the manifold materials in Social Studies develops the consciousness how to analyze on many different levels. In Social Studies you both have to deal with complex theoretical questions and to combine theories with current societal problems. Both competences are important in all kinds of further and higher education.
- As mentioned above the written dimension of the A-level develops some very important general competences for further and higher education. To write a written examination paper demands that the students are quite conscious about the taxonomic levels of the subject (Wikman, 2014). Being conscious about this can be transferred to any further and higher education whatever subject you choose to study. To write the written examination paper demands that the student is able to write and argue in an academic manner which also is a very important general competence. To write about complex societal problem using theories and methods are a general academic competence that can be used elsewhere.



Figure 3: Teaching in methods is an important part of the preparation for further Studies (Translation: The book of methods)

Understanding the complexity of Social Studies and coping with theories about societal problems develop both the ability of abstract and critical thinking and the analytical skills of the students. Unfortunately there do not exist any statistics of how the students with A-level in Social Studies cope with further and higher education. It would be of great interest to make some research about this.

10 SOCIAL STUDIES AND CITIZENSHIP – THE DANISH PERSPECTIVE

In the general law about the upper secondary education in Denmark it is said (UVM Gymnasier 2017):

“The students shall learn to relate themselves to...the surrounding world: fellow human beings, nature and society....The student shall be prepared for participation, responsibility, rights and duties in a society with freedom and democracy....The students shall be qualified to take active part in a democratic society and shall understand the possibilities for individually and jointly to contribute to development and change and at the same time have an understanding of both the local, the European and the global perspective.”

In other words, it is an important responsibility for the upper secondary school to develop the student to citizens and prepare them for citizenship (Mouritsen, 2015; Brøndum, 2018). The obvious question is then: What is the role of Social Studies to achieve this? In what manner may teaching in Social Studies contribute to develop the sense of citizenship with the students?

I think the starting point for this discussion is the question of general education (Hermann, 2018). Shortly, I will define this as knowledge about what it is called the three cultures of knowledge: Humanities, Natural Studies and Social Studies (Kagan, 2009). To be generally educated demands that you have knowledge within all three areas. If you look at the quotation from the law (see above) you can trace this recognition in the first sentence: The student shall relate themselves to fellow human beings, nature and society.

Historically general education in Denmark (and I think also in other countries) has been closely related to the humanities not least Danish Literature and History (Gustavsson, 1998). But from the end of the 1990'es there has been a rising recognition that Social Studies and Natural Studies are just as important for the general education as the humanities. You cannot be generally educated unless you have a minimum of knowledge within all areas. To have knowledge from all three is also a prerequisite for taking part in society and to take qualified positions. Let me give one example: It is important for every citizen to take a position of the question about climate changes. In order to understand the actual climate changes you should have a minimum of knowledge about Natural Studies. But it is even as important to have knowledge about Social Studies to understand the background for the decision making (and non-decision-making!) among politicians. From humanities you get used to read all kind of texts very carefully and critically which is important to see through information about the climate change.

Discussing general education is not a question of either – or about the areas of knowledge but a question of both – and. You can say that general education is built on three pillars and all three are needed. And now we can turn back to the question about the role of Social Science. It is as necessary as the other pillars and contributes in an important manner to develop the sense of citizenship.

In Social Science you get a specific and thorough knowledge about society and theories and methods of the subject (Brøndum, 2018). All subjects of course involve societal aspects but Social Studies is the only subject where you get a theoretical and methodological angle to societal problems. In this manner Social Studies is needed in order to qualify discussions and participation. The subject gives a valuable contribution to develop the sense of citizenship since

the skill of understanding societal problems and taking a point-of view is improved through the teaching.

Another aspect of the development of the sense of citizenship (Hahn, 1998) is the understanding that there are different solutions to societal problems depending on political view and ideology. In the political and economic debate positions are often represented as the only way to solve a problem. In the political theory this is called a TINA-argument named after the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She often argued that "There is no alternative" – shortened TINA. One of the most important objectives for teaching in Social Studies is to make the students understand that there always are different opinions and different solutions (Flyvbjerg, 2001). That in fact is the core of the democracy and citizenship. What students learn in Social Studies is the background for the differences but also that you need to argue substantially for your position.

One of the really big challenges in the information society is the problem with fake news. The digital platforms give good possibilities for fake news and it can be difficult for ordinary citizens to distinguish between fake news and "real" news. Teaching in Social Studies make you unfortunately not avoid fake news but it can make the students more aware of the problem and teach them to ask critical questions to all kind of news. In the era of fake news Social Studies is as necessary as ever.

11 CONCLUSION

Studying Social Studies is an important subject in the Danish educational system. It is seen as a necessary subject in order to make the students prepared for citizenship while it at the time is a subject which improves the students' abilities for further and higher education. The focus on working on different taxonomic levels in Social Studies is a very important manner of improving academic skills and making the students conscious about how to analyze societal problems.

According to the Danish tradition of education the syllabus and other guidelines for the teaching is rather broad leaving a great possibility and responsibility to the teachers. Through the education of teachers, the examination system and the national subject adviser you have a system which is quite effective to maintain the national standard.

In relation to the teaching in Social Studies and the question of both preparing for citizenship and preparing for further studies I think one of the conclusions from what is said above is that obtaining both goals – preparing for citizenship and preparing for further education- already start in the "Folkeskole" (lower secondary school) and continues in the upper secondary schools.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ For a more in-depth analysis of the background for establishing Social Studies as a separate subject in the Danish educational system see. Torben Spanget Christensen: Samfundsfag – et senmoderne fag, Nordidactica – Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education 2011:1actica 2011:1 An online version of this paper can be found at: www.kau.se/nordidactica
- ² A general survey in English of the educational system in Denmark can be found on: <https://ufm.dk/en/education/the-danish-education-system/upper-secondary-education>
- ³ The example is from summer 2014. Classes taught on Danish and English will have the same examination paper. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the translation.
- ⁴ The homepage of this book can be seen on: <https://forlagetcolumbus.dk/boeger/menneske-og-samfund/sociologi-abc/kapitler/kapitel-1/tjekspoergsmaal/>
- ⁵ See <https://www.surveybanken.aau.dk>
- ⁶ See https://www.sdu.dk/en/om_sdu/institutter/ikv